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LETTER DATED 12 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward the attached press statement on Ethiopia's preparations for war, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 12 January 1999.

Ethiopia's opting for war comes at a time when discussions on the basis of the Organization of African Unity proposals for a framework agreement are in process for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement made on 12 January 1999 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on Ethiopia's preparations for war

News leaked by various sources, including Western intelligence sources, report that the Ethiopian Government will launch attacks against Eritrea between mid January and mid February along three directions.

Meanwhile, efforts are under way by United States officials to ascertain whether the air moratorium still holds.

The Government of Eritrea has always maintained that both parties must renounce force as a means of settling their border dispute. It has repeatedly affirmed that what is needed is a binding agreement on a cessation of all hostilities, including a total ban on air strikes. The Ethiopian Government, however, has been adamantly opposed to a cessation of hostilities, even to a ban on air attacks. The result of accepting Ethiopia's condition is a precarious "moratorium" which it can unilaterally break at a time of its choosing.

Ethiopia's repeatedly declared intent to launch war is by now widely known. While anyone is free to speculate about the outcome of any such war, it is highly unfortunate that Ethiopia has been helped in its belligerent attitude by extraneous circumstances and misguided parties.

The Government of Eritrea has never considered - and does not consider - war as an option. It realizes full well that war cannot resolve the dispute. But if it is attacked, it reserves its legitimate right to self-defence. In that event, it is the Government of Ethiopia which bears full responsibility.